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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000185

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/21/2017

TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL PGOV KS

SUBJECT: GENERAL BELL MEETS KOREAN NSC POLICY CHIEF BAEK

Classified By: CDA BILL STANTON. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 17, 2007, General Burwell B. Bell, Commander UNC/CFC/USFK, paid an introductory call on Dr. Baek Jong-chon, the recently appointed Unification, Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Chief of the Presidential Secretariat and head of South Korea's National Security

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Council. During their one-hour meeting:

-- General Bell and Dr. Baek exchanged appreciation for mutual support of the United States and the Republic of Korea for the Alliance, as well as for mutual efforts to secure peace in other parts of the world.

-- Dr. Baek praised USFK's strong response to the alleged rape of a 67-year old Korean woman by a 23-year old U.S. soldier on January 14.

-- General Bell presented his strong views on the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) and its linkage to Armistice Maintenance Responsibilities (AMR).

-- Dr. Baek said the ROKG wanted as soon as possible to set a date for assuming OPCON, but pointed to the February 8 Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meeting as the appropriate mechanism for reaching agreement.

-- He accepted General Bell's argument that AMR was a military command concern, but argued it was also a political matter and a legal issue, aspects which he said the U.S. and the ROK needed to discuss before reaching a decision.

-- Both expressed displeasure over the delay in the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) and agreed to take steps to move the project forward.

-- Dr. Baek asked General Bell not to make any further public statements on the OPCON, AMR and YRP issues, citing the Korean presidential election campaign and unreliable Korean press as his reasons.

-- In addition to pledging their commitment to work together on these issues, both pointed to the SPI, the late February

visit of Defense Minister Kim Jang-soo to Washington, and a future visit by Defense Secretary Gates to Korea as opportunities for achieving further progress. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On January 17, 2007, General Burwell B. Bell, Commander United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/U.S. Forces Korea (UNC/CFC/USFK), paid a courtesy call on Dr. Baek Jong-chon, Unification, Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Chief of the Presidential Secretariat and head of South Korea's National Security Council. General Bell was accompanied by General Kim Byung-kwan, Deputy Commander of the CFC, and the Charge.

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MUTUAL APPRECIATION  
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¶3. (C) The one-hour meeting opened with reciprocal expressions of appreciation for mutual efforts made to ensure the continued strength of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. Dr. Baek gave great credit to the United States for its role in maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula and encouraging positive social and economic developments in South Korea. "The Republic of Korea appreciates USFK's continued presence," Dr. Baek said. He pointed to President Roh's strong support for President Bush's New Way Forward on Iraq as evidence of the ROK's larger commitment to the United States, saying the South Korean military's role in Iraq confirmed that the U.S.-ROK Alliance remained strong "beyond the Korean Peninsula."

¶4. (C) General Bell thanked Dr. Baek for ROK assistance to the United States over the years in Vietnam, Desert Storm, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as its many commitments to UN peacekeeping operations around the world, including the recent ROK decision to send 350 troops to UNIFIL. General Bell said these efforts were a powerful statement to the world by one of its greatest countries, and a demonstration of support for its U.S. ally. General Bell said the ROK's willingness to help the United States and the UN worldwide would be a key point in his annual testimony to the U.S. Congress in early March.

¶5. (C) Dr. Baek said he admired General Bell's leadership and appreciated his efforts to build U.S. friendship with the Korean people through his Good Neighbor Program. General Bell replied that he was honored to lead the Command, was fortunate to work with great officers, such as General Kim, his CFC Deputy, and that he had been impressed by the patriotism, character and competency of ROK military forces. He and Baek both agreed this was a significant period in the history of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in which important transformational issues to be resolved.

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JANUARY 14 RAPE CASE  
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¶6. (C) Dr. Baek cited General Bell's strong statement in response to the alleged rape of a 67-year old Korean woman by a 23-year old U.S. soldier the previous Sunday morning as a good example of effective leadership. General Bell said it was fortunate Korean police had been in the vicinity when the incident occurred and that they should be commended. He told Baek he had heard the accused soldier had apparently signed a confession, adding that if the accused were found guilty, he was certain the Korean court system would ensure that justice was carried out. Dr. Baek commented that while most Koreans valued USFK's role in defending the ROK, such unfortunate incidents damaged U.S.-ROK efforts to keep the Alliance strong. General Bell replied that while he would make every effort to prevent such incidents from occurring, it would also help if the South Korean government issued statements of support for the Alliance in the face of such incidents to convince the Korean public that the importance of the Alliance outweighed the actions of one criminal soldier.

OPCON TRANSFER

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¶ 7. (C) Turning to two of the more challenging issues facing the Alliance, General Bell outlined his views on the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) and its linkage with Armistice Maintenance Responsibilities (AMRs). In his frank comments, General Bell stressed the following points:

- The Command needed to plan based on a specific OPCON transfer date (not merely an undefined X date).
- Necessary approvals from Washington and consultations with the Congress would require a definite date.
- A minimum of three years would be needed to carry out the transfer.
- The USG supported the ROKG's goal of becoming a more self-reliant military power.
- USFK had great confidence in the Korean military.
- The USG would retain, and if need be bring in bridging capabilities needed to ensure there would be no decrease in the ability of the Alliance to defeat any attack from North Korea.

¶ 8. (C) Dr. Baek replied that the ROKG wanted to reach agreement as soon as possible on a date for transfer of wartime OPCON. He said, however, that the February 8 Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meeting was the appropriate mechanism for reaching that agreement, commenting that military experts should address the issue.

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ARMISTICE RESPONSIBILITIES

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¶ 9. (C) Turning to the related issue of the transfer or delegation of AMRs, Dr. Baek called the matter a "legal issue," stressing that the United Nations had delegated United Nations Command authority to the United States and implying that UNC authority could not be separated from Armistice responsibilities. General Bell strongly disagreed, pointing out that the issue was a military command concern, not a legal issue. The authority to posture armed forces, including ROK forces, was a command issue, and an important one in that it could involve the lives of many people, he said. He stressed that a mismatch between responsibility and authority (which would occur after OPCON transfer if AMRs were not also transferred) was not tolerable for a military commander. At the same time, General Bell said he remained a strong advocate of the need for the U.S. to retain the UN Command to ensure the continuing support of the UN contributing countries. While retaining the command, however, the U.S. would have to delegate to the AMRs to ROK forces, Bell explained, adding that this would have to be done in a way which did not open the United States to the charge that we were exercising "back door control" of Korean forces.

¶ 10. (C) Dr. Baek replied that he fully understood and agreed with the command aspects of General Bell's argument. He stated, however, that the issue also involved political and public affairs concerns, in addition to legal considerations.

He recommended the United States and the ROK discuss all aspects before reaching a decision, or making any public comments on transferring AMRs.

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YONGSAN RELOCATION

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¶ 11. (C) General Bell expressed empathy for the South Korean citizens displaced by the expansion of Camp Humphreys necessary to make way for the relocation and consolidation of U.S. Forces Korea under the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) and Land Partnership Plan (LPP). He nonetheless urged Dr. Baek to do everything possible to move the implementation of those agreements forward. General Bell explained that a widely quoted comment he had made during the Q&A portion of his January 9 press conference -- that he would "fight" to see

those two agreements implemented stemmed from his determination to provide for the welfare of his troops and normalize their tours of duty in Korea. He noted that after YRP and LPP were completed we would be able to assign more soldiers who were married with children to Korea, and who would serve in Korea for a longer period of time (3 years), and so would also be more likely to interact well with the Korean people, furthering U.S.-ROK relations. While he understood completion of YRP by 2008 was not merely problematic, but impossible, General Bell insisted it was very important that every effort be made to move the project forward as quickly as possible.

¶12. (C) Dr. Baek replied that he too had been surprised and displeased by the leaks to the Korean press claiming YRP would be delayed until 2013. He said the YRP Master Plan would soon be released and he predicted that it would contain an exact completion date. He stated that the ROKG shared the U.S. goal of completing the project as close to that agreed date as possible.

¶13. (C) In addition to pledging their shared commitment to work together on the OPCON, AMR and YRP issues, General Bell and Dr. Baek agreed the SPI on February 8, the late February visit of Defense Minister Kim Jang-soo to Washington, and a visit by Defense Secretary Gates to Korea at an appropriate time would be good opportunities for achieving further progress on these issues.

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CAUTION ON PUBLIC STATEMENTS  
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¶14. (C) Dr. Baek's primary purpose throughout the meeting, and the issue to which he repeatedly returned, was his concern that General Bell not to make any public statements about these issues. Dr. Baek stated that the ROK had only recently become a mature democracy, but that many members of the press and the public were not yet ready for that. He said that after forty years experience in political science, his one month in the Blue House had changed his perspective on the media, commenting that they were likely to distort anything General Bell had to say publicly. He warned that would be particularly likely to occur this year, as 2007 was a presidential election year in Korea. These were complicated issues, Dr. Baek said, and any comments General Bell made might be easily misinterpreted. Handing the General his name card a smiling Baek said the General should give him a call if he had any questions before making public statements. General Bell joked that the Ministry of National Defense should do likewise and give him a call before they issue any public statements on these issues. He pointed out to Dr. Baek that all his public statements could be found in undistorted form on the USFK website.

¶15. (U) General Bell has cleared this message.  
STANTON